

# Water board backs Big River site for state police HQ

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By **PAUL EDWARD PARKER**  
Providence Journal staff writer

PROVIDENCE -- The state Water Resources Board voted 8 to 1 this afternoon to approve the concept of taking 18 acres from the Big River Reservoir holdings for construction of a state police headquarters. The West Greenwich parcel was condemned from its private owners in 1966 for a reservoir that was never built. Since then, the General Assembly passed legislation barring development on the land. Some predict the Big River Reservoir will be needed someday.

The lone negative vote was cast by William M. Stamp III, a farmer who worries the state will have no other place to build a reservoir, if it needs to. "I feel this is a blatant misuse of the property. It was taken from individuals to use for a reservoir," said Stamp, who is also the head of the Rhode Island Farm Bureau.



Proposed location of State Police headquarters

Water Resources Board Chairman Daniel W. Varin said the board is in discussions with state officials to swap another 18 acres of land for the parcel the state police want. A board staff report said that allowing the state police to use the 18 acres would not prevent construction of the reservoir. Environmental groups condemned taking land that had been protected from development, saying it would have a chilling effect on future efforts to safeguard open space. "The long-term implications of this proposal on the willingness of Rhode Island citizens to invest public funds in the creation of open space -- only to see it developed later -- are tremendously negative," H. Curtis Spalding, executive director of Save The Bay, said in a statement.

Today's vote is not the final say on the matter. The state still must come back to the board with a specific proposal to transfer the land. Also, the General Assembly would have to pass an exception to the law that bars development on the Big River land.

Online at: <http://www.projo.com/digitalbulletin/content/20050614-bigriver.c120637.html>